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## Guyana govt must abide by CCJ ruling

Express Editorial Jul 22, 2019



THAT representatives both of the government and the opposition in neighbouring Guyana were in Port of Spain late last week on different missions, in the shadows of a highly contentious arrangement for now-delayed national election there, brings the situation there into sharper focus for us here.

A government team was here in what was described as an investment invitation mission while the opposition was seeking to draw attention to the increasing level of tension over the government's actions which appear to frustrate the process for speedy general elections.

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This was the commitment given by Guyana's President David Granger, who is on record as saying that his government, finally, would honour the ruling of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) delivered on June 18, 2019, that both parties to work together to hold fresh elections.

In mandating this, the CCJ ruling said it was "expected that the government will continue in office as a caretaker for the affairs of the country" but in light of this, it should be restrained in the use of its legal authority.

The CCJ ruling also pointed out that there was "clear guidance" in the Guyanese constitution as to the time frame for holding elections, where a government is defeated on a vote of no confidence. This article says such an election should be held not more than three months later.

But insisting that a new house to house voter registration exercise is necessary, the government has got the country's Elections Commission (GECOM) to move ahead with such an exercise. It has been revealed, however, that the legal counsel on the GECOM has proffered advise that such action would amount to a contempt of the CCJ ruling.

Two major private sector organisations, the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA) and the Private Sector Commission (PSC), have written letters calling for the speedy holding of the elections.

In its letter, the GMSA warned of the possible negative consequences which could attend continued postponement of the elections, while the PSC has argued against any rationale for the new registration exercise.

Demonstrations began late last week, with Guyanese nationals opposed to the voter registration exercise amassed outside the GECOM headquarters.

Tension is building over a situation which had its beginning in the essential collapse of the administration when it lost a no-confidence motion in the 65-member National Assembly, in which the government held a one-seat majority. One of its own members voted with the opposition on December 21, 2018.

The government challenged this all the way to the CCJ, arguing incredulously that 33 out of 65 was not a sufficient majority.

Guyana has emerged from a turbulent history of race riots, during decades of social and political turmoil. The country is at the dawn of a new day with offshore energy production. But nothing positive can come of what is essentially a refusal by the government to abide by the rule of law.

The government must do nothing further to frustrate the will of the Guyanese people, and the spirit of the country's constitution. It must quit stalling, and take positive steps to call the election sooner rather than later.